



Senate Bill 283 Mental Health – Workforce Development – Fund Established
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 8, 2023
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Voices of Hope, Inc. is a nonprofit community-based organization that serves individuals with substance use disorders in Cecil and Harford Counties. We provide harm reduction and SUD treatment navigation services, operate Recovery Community Centers and 2 recovery houses. We engage with people who use drugs and are experiencing traumatic events including wounds from injection drug use and homelessness. We believe that many severe health concerns could be addressed in primary care settings before reaching the level of needing crisis health care.

Maryland is in the midst of a behavioral health workforce crisis. Federal data ¹ released just this month found that Maryland has 63 federally designated mental health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) ², including 11 entire counties. These shortage areas, in which less than 20% of residents are getting their mental health needs met, impact over 1.7 million Marylanders. Another indicator found that 17 of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions come in below the national average (350:1) in terms of population to mental health providers, with a number that are considerably lower. In Cecil County, we have NO inpatient treatment and detox providers that accept Medicaid. A reason for not having a provider is the lack of available workforce in the area.

This is unsustainable. There are simply not enough behavioral health professionals to meet the mental health and substance use needs of all Marylanders. There are many positive ideas and strategies for growing the behavioral health workforce – stipends and scholarships, enhanced training programs, loan repayment, paid internships, etc. The question, however, is how much funding do we put into these different initiatives and how do we target efforts to ensure we are properly resourcing all behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals? **SB 283 is the answer.**

The bill establishes a Behavioral Health Workforce Investment Fund to reimburse for costs associated with educating, training, certifying, recruiting, placing, and retaining behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals. Funding is left discretionary initially to allow for a required workforce needs assessment that will (1) determine the immediate, intermediate, and long-term unmet need and capacity of Maryland's behavioral health workforce; (2) calculate the total number of behavioral health professionals and paraprofessionals needed over the next 5 years, 10 years, and 20 years; and (3) make very specific findings and recommendations regarding the types of workforce assistance programs and funding necessary to meet the need across all sectors of the behavioral health workforce.

Successful recovery support in the community depends on quality treatment available in the area. With a limited workforce, treatment needs are being unaddressed. Future expansion of treatment is restricted because we can't even treat the people who need it now.

This bill will expand and stabilize Maryland's behavioral health workforce. **For these reasons, Voices of Hope, Inc. urges this committee to pass SB 283.**

Thank you,

Jennifer Tuerke
Executive Director

¹ <https://data.hrsa.gov/Default/GenerateHPSAQuarterlyReport>

² A HPSA is a geographic area, population group, or health care facility that has been designated by the US Health Resources and Services

Administration (HRSA) as having a shortage of health professionals in one of three categories – primary care, dental health, and mental health

³ <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/maryland?year=2022&measure=Mental+Health+Providers&tab=1>